

COMMENTARY

FRANCE'S HOMELESS LEFT

The Slow Awakening from the Communist Dream

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PARIS

BETWEEN the totalitarian fortress of the French Communist party and an untenanted liberal-socialist house of cards in which the remnants of the "third force" have been trying to set up housekeeping, there lies a vast no-man's-land in which the groups and grouplets of the French Left wander about in search of a position. Everyone feels that this search is important, whether it is formulated negatively as an endeavor to break through the Communist blockade between working class and nation, or positively as an endeavor to provide a solid foundation for French democracy, which today

reminds one of Munchausen hanging in midair by his own pigtail.

It is true that the political stagnation in France largely reflects a protracted economic and social stagnation. To turn this proposition about, however, and assert that a gradual economic recovery would automatically provide an exit from the present political and ideological impasse, is a gross oversimplification. A path of return from the never-never-land of millennial promises and apocalyptic fears to the banality of daily work and daily politics is long and difficult when ideologies have congealed into warring churches and institutions. Admittedly, faiths have become lukewarm; even the Communist rank and file, though they still vote for the party, pay their dues with reluctance and have ceased to march in parades. This situation opens up innumerable possibilities of muddling through. But it does not solve the basic problem of a democracy in which a third of the electorate professes Communism (if only with the ballot, and as a gesture of dissatisfaction); while another third, in reaction to the Communists, has ceased to believe in democracy as a possibility and clamors for a savior in the form of "the General" de Gaulle or the police. The remaining political third is represented by parties which are far too busy with the thankless task of bolstering up a regime without a popu-

FRANCE is the land of radicalism: of liberty, fraternity, and equality; it is also a land whose intellectuals have always prided themselves on their logic. Yet even a casual reading of the French press and French periodicals reveals the mental processes of the non-Communist French Left as devious to the point of the fantastic—a fact which has some relation to the ability of the Communists to get one-third of the popular vote at the last election. What explains the confusion of the French Left? HERBERT LÜTHY, who here tries to answer that question, is a young Swiss journalist whose writings on French politics have attracted considerable attention in Europe. He was born in Basel in 1918 and studied at the Universities of Paris, Geneva, and Zurich. He is the author of studies on Swiss economic and contemporary European history. This article has been translated from the German by Ralph Manheim.

lar majority, holding it together by every known kind of intrigue and horse trade, to exert any possible force of attraction or inspiration.

It seems obvious that the only hope of saving democracy from the threat of a Communist police state lies in the formation of a new democratic Left—or at least of a Left that is not a fifth column of the Soviet totalitarian state. At the same time, a broader, more representative democracy cannot be achieved without the participation of the workers who are today shut up in the Communist "ghetto." But none of the parties that now uphold the present regime of make-shifts, and that fear to abandon it because of its very feebleness, can act as a rallying point, or provide the disgruntled Communists-in-spite-of-it-all with an answer to the question: "Where should we go?" Or even to the question: "Whom else can we vote for?" To create a party with such an answer is the secret or open aspiration of all the various groups and grouplets of the Left.

THESE organizations of the non-Communist Left live by the idea that they are merely an advance guard of the "homeless left-wing masses" who dwell in the Communist party as in exile, and stay there merely because they "do not know where else to go." Their power of attracting the Communist rank and file is the criterion by which all these groups judge themselves and by which others judge them—and in terms of which they have all thus far failed. Just as there is more joy in heaven over a repentant sinner than over ninety and nine righteous men, there is (or would be) more joy in any of these groups over a single repentant Communist than over ninety and nine other proselytes, who "wouldn't be Communists anyway."

This approach is perhaps one main reason for all contradictions and failures. The unhappy fact is that the homeless Left has begun its mission to the heathen while it is still in search of a faith for itself. While no one would cast doubt on the sincerity of their quest, these non-Communist Left

groups too often seem to be chiefly concerned with finding something which would permit them to compete with Communist opinion in the minds of the people. But all of them can offer nothing to compete with the most powerful ingredient of the Communist opium: the hypnotic prestige of Soviet power. Moreover, in their eagerness to break into the Communist ranks, the Left groups often fail to dissociate themselves from Communism. The result is a strange phenomenon: the Communist bloc exerts a simultaneous attraction and repulsion which makes the choreography of the homeless Left as complicated and difficult to describe as a swarm of gnats dancing around a street lamp.

The metaphor is not exaggerated: at first glance the seething and swarming of the leftists in the Paris laboratory seems utterly without meaning. Each group speaks—directly to the masses, of course—and no one listens; many banners with few followers. Often we have a grouplet with less than ten members, making impressive sacrifices to publish a theoretical organ which the whole membership peddles on Sundays. After our grouplet has enrolled its first hundred members, it begins with appalling solemnity to discuss the problem of the seizure of power: united front or general strike? Over this question it splits into two bitterly hostile groups, each with a theoretical organ of its own, each jealously guarding the flame of the one true socialism. Much of this activity can hardly be regarded as political, but rather comes under the heading of club activities. The collector of curios may note with awe the survival of a small group still faithful to the principles of the First International.

In the whirl of all these particles, we can at best discern certain main groupings which have long since ceased to be coherent movements, but which still betray their diverse origins by their varying reactions to the Communists.

FIRST of all, we have the various opposition groups which the Communist party itself discarded during its evolution

from a revolutionary movement to the Russian state party, beginning with the Trotskyists, and ending with Titoists or *Titistes* as they are called in France. They have the sectarian spirit of genuine heretics, invoking the true doctrine and the primitive purity against the Stalinist degeneration, and essentially interpreting their battle with the Communist party as an attempt to correct an error. Their burning ambition in the first postwar years was to unmask the counter-revolutionary trend of the Communists, to spur them on to a violent seizure of power, to turn the Communist strike maneuvers into a revolutionary general strike, in short, to act as the Leninist conscience of the Communist leadership. During the clumsy, zigzagging transition of the Communist party from loyal participation in the government to total obstruction (1946-47), the little Trotskyist party, hitherto totally insignificant, achieved for a short time a certain stature as a political nuisance. Since 1948 it has almost ceased to exist as an institution, but, as an intellectual leaven, Trotskyism has retained its importance.

Far more numerous are the splinters constantly being torn away from the Socialist party. While many of these splinters were considerable at the time of their withdrawal from the unfortunate mother party, by now it is usually hard to trace their whereabouts. For lack of ideological uniform, the troops tend to lose themselves in the political countryside, and all that can be found are little dissident bands offering no more than an illusion of political existence. Many of these bands, having left the Socialist party out of an unsatisfied thirst for action, succumbed almost inevitably to the attraction of the Communist mass party. The lower cadres of Marceau Pivert's Socialist Workers and Peasants party, which split off from the Socialist party shortly before the Second World War, largely fell into Communist catch-all organizations during the war, while the leaders, beginning with Marceau Pivert himself, returned more or less empty-handed to the old Socialist party. Beginning in 1947, there was a new wave of splits from the Socialist

party; in the summer the Socialist Youth, which was shot through with Trotskyists, was expelled, and was soon followed by a group led by former party secretary Dechezelles; in the following winter the "Bataille Socialiste" faction, advocating a Socialist-Communist united front, declared its independence under the ominous name—for those conscious of the German experience—of Socialist Unity party. Since then it has loyally played its part as a come-on for the Communist united front, though recently, because of Trotskyist infiltration, it has come under suspicion of Titoism. Closely akin to this Socialist Unity party are the "non-partisan" groups in the backwash of the Communist party, particularly the Republican Resistance Union around Pierre Cot, the Comte de Chambrun, and Professor Rivet; this group leads a purely parliamentary existence as a reservoir of future Fierlingers, predestined puppets for the Communists.

It is with some hesitation that we consider the Left Catholic organizations along with the splinter groups gravitating round the two large parties, the Communists and Socialists. The Catholic organizations spring from an entirely different tradition and have at least this advantage: they are not congenitally burdened with complexes growing out of their relation to the Communist party. The very existence and recognition of a religious Left is in France—where, for the last century, leftism has been identified with anticlericalism and hostility to religion—a revolutionary development. Despite their numerical weakness, the socialist wings of the National Republican Movement and of the Christian unions have in the past year been the only consistent counterweight to the Communists and perhaps the most important source of strength in the disintegrating Left. Associated with these, but at an increasing distance from the earth, is a whole hierarchy of groups, including the "Jeune République," founded in 1900 as a pure embodiment of political idealism, the Personalistic groups around the late Emmanuel Mounier's magazine, *Esprit*, and the forlorn little Union of

Progressive Christians which, on the basis of a neo-Thomist division between the spiritual and the secular, assigns the hereafter to God but the life of this world to Stalin.

THIS rough division of the Left into three groups—dissident Communist, former Socialist, and Left Catholic—leaves out of consideration a large number of more or less anarchistic “movements” the mere listing of which would require a book. The Resistance, that hotbed of apocalyptic notions, threw a whole new generation of Left politicals of every kind into the arena, men obligated to none of the old “schools”; above all, it inextricably confounded all the groups and turned the postwar career of the French Left into a history of personal turns and shifting associations. It is always the same six or eight dozen names that, in constantly changing combinations, figure in the manifestoes of the independent Left. Because these men’s names are familiar to us from appearing in so many manifestoes, the names achieve a spurious political significance, and we mistake their moves about the political scene for changes in the political scene itself. Again one is reminded of the swarming gnats round a lamp.

As an example of a career of this sort, here is the story of a man remarkable neither for his intelligence nor his personality, but who somehow always manages to publish his editorials in a significant spot; a typical figure of the homeless Left. In his youth Marcel Fourrier was a member of the Communist party. Before the war he went over to a revolutionary opposition group bearing the symbolic name “Que Faire?” and thence passed to the Socialist party, which he left again in 1947 with the “Bataille Socialiste” group. Soon he moved into the editorial offices of a “progressive” daily of the Communist type, where he continued to fight staunchly for the unity of the Left. However, like most Socialist champions of unity, he recently has fallen under suspicion of Titoism—and here the whole cycle might well begin over again.

In all these shifts we can discern no trace of any change of outlook, and this is what is

so typical. In all the writings of this editorialist, not a line reveals the slightest awareness that behind the slogans there might be some problems; from Communist, dissident Communist, Socialist, and again Communist platforms, Marcel Fourrier has always imperturbably repeated the same classical platitudes, which are the common heritage of the Left, the principles of 1789 and 1848: the people and the oppressors, the Republic and laicism, the revolution and the rights of man, freedom, equality, fraternity, socialism, and democracy. He has never felt the slightest need for precision. Fourrier’s style is one in which every leftist audience feels at home without intellectual effort; one might call it the style of revolutionary quietism.

In somewhat higher regions, things do become more problematic. The shaky career of the newspaper *Combat*, which in recent years was the liveliest organ of the Left intelligentsia, is a case in point. It still carries the subtitle: “From Resistance to Revolution,” and its first legal number in August 1944 defined—or promised to define—this latter concept:

“In the days to come we shall define the word revolution by our articles and our acts. But for the moment our sense of energy and honor, our resolution, will be satisfied if we break with the spirit of mediocrity, with the power of money, and with a state of society in which the ruling class has betrayed all its duties and revealed a lack both of intelligence and of heart. Our endeavor is to realize without delay a true people’s and workers’ democracy.”

In the “days to come” *Combat* proceeded by devious ways to “define” revolution. Beginning with the “socialist humanism” of Camus and Malraux, it sailed the waters of the post-Resistance with Raymond Aron and Albert Olivier, one of whom has since become a member of the Gaullist national council, the other an editor of the Gaullist party organ. It ran aground for a short time in 1947 on the desolate shoals of official Socialism. Then, restored to solvency by M. Smadja, a Tunisian businessman, it embarked under the guidance of Claude Bour-

det—who in 1947 had founded the "Socialisme et Liberté" group and the magazine *Octobre* in collaboration with Henri Frenay—upon a long unreciprocated flirtation with the Communist party, until M. Smadja had his belly full and Bourdet was "stabbed in the back" by Frenay. But in order to live on, and to keep in touch with its more or less imaginary readership, the paper had to "keep left" somehow, and in his search for a really non-Communist Left group with literary gifts, M. Smadja found the Surrealists. They made *Combat* a very amusing, if not politically very serious, organ of St. Germain-des-Prés and the Quartier Latin.

IN AN even more problematic, if rarefied, atmosphere, the two well-known intellectual magazines, *Esprit* and *Les Temps Modernes*, revolve on the axes of their respective philosophies, Personalism and Existentialism. Both of them, one with an impressive and often discouraging integrity of effort anchored in religious faith, the other with dazzling wit, have for years been creating infinite confusion.

Esprit until recently clung, with certain reservations, to the view that "history is moving in the direction of Communism," that "anti-Communism" is accordingly a sin against the Spirit, and that the only positive program consisted in an effort to "transcend Communism" with the Communists. But it seems at last to have found a way out of the Kremlin-Wall Street dualism—via the detour, rather odd for an organ devoted to the Spirit, of Marshal Tito, whose eruption from the Stalinist front has provided the Manicheans of all countries with a unique escape from their dilemma.

In contrast, according to a law of uneven development that seems to be the only law governing the movements of this sector of the Left, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, after years of skirmishing against subaltern Communist scribes, have discovered Marxism in the pages of *Les Temps Modernes*. Marxism does not seem to have gained greatly in the process. From a method of social criticism, it would appear to have de-

veloped into a system of messianic postulates rotating abstractly on their own axis: since Marxist prophecy posits as the total aim of History the world revolution that will make the proletariat into a "universal class" and realize the concept of Humanity, this prophecy must be fulfilled—or else, "by definition," History is meaningless.

"Whether the slaves, in expropriating the masters, are transcending the alternative of slavery or domination, is another question. But if this development did not occur, it would not mean that the Marxist philosophy of History would have to be replaced by another: it would mean that there is no History. . . . Outside of Marxism there is nothing but the violence of the one group and the submission of the other. . . ." (Merleau-Ponty, *Essai sur le Communisme*.)

How the virgin comes by this child, how the Existentialist philosophy of the absurd arrives at this total "teleology of History," can be understood only as a miracle of sudden illumination. As he shows by operating with such absolute brickbats as "masters and slaves" as a substitute for any differentiated sociology, Merleau-Ponty has taken over the Marxist eschatology, but nothing of its method as a critique of history and society, and the result is a mere thinking in slogans. From Marx he has learned the contrary of what Marx taught: to regard not what people do but only what they say. In his inexorable view, all earthly forms of state and society are tainted with the same imperfection—"The Russians have not introduced free elections everywhere [!]; but what are we to say of the Greek elections?"—and for him there is no such thing as a question of degree. Guided by the standard of the ideological absolute, we must support, not those who attempt to realize an attainable measure of freedom, prosperity, and human dignity, but those whose official state philosophy supports the absolute truth of Marxist prophecy, regardless of how their regimes may look in practice. Reality cannot be our criterion, for all reality is wretched; we must judge by the promise, even if it is only a mystification.

According to this way of thinking, the

Soviet Union is the land of the total promise, the United States at best the land of mere proximate realization. How can a Marshall Plan outweigh the promise of a "new Humanity"—even when this Humanity is to arise from a mountain of corpses? This is especially true when the Marshall Plan is seen in simple Marxist terms as an escape valve for American capitalism. There is an almost unbelievable ignorance of historical actuality at the root of the French Left's political valuations, and this ignorance most tragically reveals how characteristically provincial the French political cosmos has become since the mission of France can no longer be identified with the mission of humanity, and how national pride has been transformed into paranoia. The respectfulness toward the Soviet Union does not contradict this chauvinism: the French have never been able to understand the Russian Revolution as anything other than a Robespierrian triumph, a reaffirmation under unfavorable circumstances of the French revolutionary spirit. America, however—and except for a small elite this opinion holds true in England, too—has remained a strange land, because it cannot be defined by a handful of familiar principles; "capitalism" has become the ersatz-definition of America. The conversion of ignorance about America to hostility to America is explained by the fact that the pressure of technological and social change upon France's archaic economic and social structure is felt mainly as a pressure of America upon Europe.

TRANSLATED into practice, this attitude has resulted in the solemn dismissal of David Rousset from the staff of *Les Temps Modernes* and his public denunciation by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. It is true, say the two masters, that in Soviet Russia one-tenth of the working population is being worked to death in "corrective camps"; and they go so far as to wonder "on what basis we may still speak of socialism in connection with the Soviet Union"; nevertheless, Rousset, with his campaign against the concentration camps, has "gone over to the enemy." For:

"Assuredly we see the illusions of the present-day Communists. But these very illusions forbid us to equate Communism and fascism. . . . It is true that these ideas have a disloyal champion in Communism as it is today, and that they serve the present Communists more as eyewash than as an inspiration. . . . [But] we have the same values as a Communist. . . . He has values in spite of himself. We may think that he desecrates them by embodying them in present-day Communism. Nevertheless, they are our values, whereas we have nothing whatever in common with the many opponents of Communism."

And, finally, the two masters of Existentialism feel, quite mistakenly, that they are still far enough from the firing line to indulge in "common illusions" about the Communist reality:

"The farther we travel geographically and politically from the Soviet Union, the more we find Communists who are human beings just like us. . . ."

In reality these thinkers have traveled far from the Soviet Union in the last few years. Today Sartre and Merleau-Ponty accept "faults" in the Soviet system that two or three years ago they would have denied as diabolical inventions of Goebbels' propaganda machine. And even if they persist in thinking not in realities but in definitions, they have nevertheless taken cognizance of realities that contradict certain of their definitions. Perhaps even today the truths which they reluctantly acknowledge weigh more heavily in the balance than the definitions they uphold against their better judgment. There is even reason to hope that in time their thinking will progress even further—if history leaves them time.

IN A few great moments, the whole homeless Left has banded together in broad movements. This first occurred in the enthusiasm of the liberation, when the Mouvement de Libération Nationale briefly rallied the whole non-Communist Resistance around a program of thoroughgoing social and political reforms. With its three hundred thousand members and innumerable publications, the

MLN appeared to be the great new power in French politics. "If we wish to maintain this mobilization of energies, we must accept a technique similar to that of the Communists, i.e., we must observe within our own movement as great a discipline as do the Communists, with all the heroism, ruthlessness, and hardship which this implies," said André Malraux in January 1945, at the decisive meeting of the MLN, which rejected a Communist proposal of complete fusion. Malraux himself took this way of discipline and ruthlessness and it led him to the Rassemblement of General de Gaulle. Others traveled by parallel ways to the Communist party. The rest tried to make contact with the Socialists but found closed doors: the inertia of a party machine dominated by "old comrades" and old slogans resisted any incursion of new blood or new ideas. Today under the name of the Union of Social Democratic Resistance, the original movement survives as a parliamentary group. It includes members who have followed Malraux to Gaullism, and others who support the government coalition of the "third force"; but as a whole it has become the junior partner of the venerable Radical Socialist party, which is itself divided into a Gaullist and a pro-government faction.

IN THE fall of 1947 the Cominform was founded and carried the "cold war" to France. Again the homeless Left was compelled to reconsider its attitude toward Communism and democracy. It was then that Léon Blum devised the formula of the "third force," whose political calvary need not be described here: it was the calvary of every mere policy of the lesser evil. But the "third force" slogan, which for a moment had kindled men's hearts, is still with us. The manifesto with which, some months later, in the *crise de conscience* which followed the collapse of democracy in Czechoslovakia, an organization called the Democratic Revolutionary Rally made its first public appearance, was an extremist formulation of the need for a new middle road:

"Millions of us in France, Europe, and the

whole world, are seeking the same road . . . a road between the putrefaction of capitalist democracy, the weaknesses and faults of a certain brand of Social Democracy, and the Stalinist form of Communism. We believe that a union of free men in revolutionary democracy can give new life to the principles of freedom and human dignity, by combining them with the struggle for social revolution. . . . Workers and free men of all lands, unite!"

This movement was launched by the widely read newspaper *Franc-Tireur*, which hitherto had stuck to the Communists through thick and thin, and which in workers' circles had been regarded as a "more intelligent supplement to *l'Humanité*." Now it underwent a sort of palace revolution which triumphed over such stubborn fellow-travelers as Fourrier (who left *Franc-Tireur* for a new Communist-following organ, *Libération*). David Rousset and Jean-Paul Sartre, and such a lone wolf as André Breton, lent their patronage; *Combat*, *Esprit*, *Les Temps Modernes* supported it, the left wing of the Socialist party, the majority of the Trotskyist group, Dechezelles' Socialist Youth, "Jeune République," and many smaller groups joined in—the whole homeless Left seemed to have found its party. A series of intellectually brilliant manifestoes aroused international interest. Young people who felt that there was no place for them in the existing parties attended meetings and discussion groups all over France. Pacifist sentiment was mobilized around the popular figure of the world citizen Garry Davis, seriously embarrassing the "peace" propaganda of the Communists. The trade union crisis provoked by the Communist machine even created for the first time a basis for "mass action": in Lyons, Paris, and other cities, "revolutionary democrats" formed an action committee out of the various dissident trade union groups, though to be sure it disintegrated after the Communist trade union league expelled those who had broken discipline.

In the winter and spring of 1948, the movement seemed to be at its zenith. Then came summer, the dead season of France's political life. And when the members and

sympathizers returned from their vacations, the movement had disappeared without any obituary notice. Jean-Paul Sartre, who had discovered Marxism, quarreled with David Rousset, who had already left Marxism behind him; *Combat* had become the organ of the non-orthodox Communist intelligentsia; Garry Davis had withdrawn into his meditations—in short, nothing remained, and in the end everyone realized that a glittering soap bubble had burst. The movement's dual endeavor, scarcely conscious and yet recognizable both in its manifesto and its name, to give the "masses" both more revolutionary slogans and more democratic manners than the Communists, had amounted to nothing more than a brilliant feat of vaudeville magic.

But the experiment was not entirely in vain. It did break through the sectarianism of the groups and grouplets of the Left, it lifted barriers, created contacts between people who had hitherto looked upon one another as enemies—Socialists, Trotskyists, Christian Socialists, and other dissidents—and these contacts survived the demise of the organization. It gave many young people, who for the first time had taken the step from political thinking to practical political activity, a feeling for the intractability of reality, for the impossibility of conjuring up a political force by mere ideology, for the inertia inherent in every organization, and perhaps some understanding of the political responsibility which the "third force" parties, the Socialists and Popular Republicans, so bitterly need. It provided new democratic forces with a beginning of political training. For beneath the chaotic political surface, the hope lies in those who still have no name and no platform from which to speak. But, like other stirrings beneath the stagnant film of French political life, this must be regarded as a hope far more than a force.

ON THE surface nothing has changed. The searching youth and the countless workers who are becoming increasingly aware that the Communist machine is using them for ulterior purposes can expect little leadership from the present masters of simple left-

ist "doublethink." If not for the similar bankruptcy on the Right, we might speak of a bankruptcy on the Left.

But what is the Left? Obviously there is something wrong with the whole frame of reference. We tend to regard "Left" as a direction, but instead we find a condition. In this old country, whose social structure has become almost congealed, "Left" does not mean a vision of the future but a tradition, hence a past. It might be most accurate to say that France is "Left." Except for a few carry-overs from the *ancien régime*, who look upon the last hundred and fifty years of history as a deplorable mistake—and, it must be admitted, adduce some good reasons for this opinion—there is scarcely anyone in France who owns to being on the political Right; the extreme Right grudgingly admits to being "moderate." The party which is conservative in the truest sense, which is the guardian of every moth-eaten tradition, proudly calls itself the Radical Socialist party.

"Left" are all those who profess the national tradition of the Great Revolution of 1789; "Left" is the "Republic," for whose defense the most conservative bourgeoisie on the Continent has always known how to rally the whole country; "Left" is the bourgeoisie itself, which through Revolution, Directorate, Empire, and all the convulsions that followed, has expanded its political leadership and the economic monopolies that went with it, and which has successfully defended its privileges against "reaction" ever since; "Left" is the peasantry which has stubbornly defended the land seized by its revolutionary ancestors, against the enemies of the day before yesterday, against the church and feudal overlords, and which in its most opulent villages has persistently and solidly voted for the parties of the "Left"; "Left" are the elementary school teachers, a decisive element in the political sociology of France, for it is they who transmit the tradition from generation to generation; and radically "Left," it goes without saying, are those classes to which the Revolution has given little more than enthusiasm for revolution. "We are the sons of 1789, our holiday is the Four-

teenth of July, our anthem is the Marseillaise"—thus did Léon Say, first finance minister of the Third Republic, open one of his election campaigns amid the shadiest of financial dealings. Even Bonapartism is "Left," insofar as Napoleon was the heir of the Revolution and, in the opinion at least of the school system, its culmination; the enthusiasms of the Gaullists are nourished from the same springs as those of the Communists.

"The Revolution is all one bloc," said Clemenceau: the September murders, the revolutionary tribunals, the guillotine as a national cult, the *Loi des suspects*, the terror, are as much a part of it as the Rights of Man. Recently we have seen the aged rationalist Julien Benda joined with Jacques Duclos in defending the democratic justice of the Rajk trial in Budapest. His mumbled words did not make it clear whether Benda, who during the trial happened to be on vacation in the Puszta as the guest of the Hungarian government, had any opinions on the circumstances and purpose of the trial. The audience at the meeting seemed rather ill at ease when for some unfathomable reason he recalled that as a young man he had fought for justice against *raison d'état* in the Dreyfus case. But though he plainly had no idea of the issues involved, he eagerly availed himself of the occasion to confront the "lachrymose sentimentalists of the West" with the old Jacobin truth that "democracy is justified in practicing terror in self-defense"; and apparently, after harboring this profound thought for a sufficient number of years, he has come to regard terror as the distinguishing feature of true militant democracy. Thus can revolutionary formulas, grown senile after a long career in the realm of pure rhetoric, suddenly gain a new lease on life and go berserk.

THE French socialists have never critically examined and digested the history of those years in the late 18th century which shook the world, but have used it merely as an arsenal of revolutionary images which have seldom had any bearing on the actual needs and potentialities of the country, and yet could generally be counted on to arouse

French audiences to a fine frenzy of retrospective emotion and enthusiasm.

It is significant that the word "democracy," unlike "Republic," has never gained true popularity in France: the Jacobin tradition is republican but not democratic, let alone liberal. And indeed French democrats have never achieved that minimum of respect for their opponent, of serious objective discussion, of moderation in tone, which characterizes political life in England, for example; in compensation they possess the armor of skepticism which every Frenchman opposes to the irresponsible exaggerations of political rhetoric.

The political ferment of the Revolution was poured off into bottles and labeled. The whole system of classification—Left, moderate Left, extreme Left—has relevance to a parliamentary seating arrangement and to nothing else. In England, where majority and opposition do not sit side by side but sit facing one another, the system is still an unassimilated import from the Continent: even today an Englishman does not usually stand to the "right" or "left" of a measure or a party, he is for or against it. In short, the whole terminology in which the French Left moves and defines itself is at best a guide to a parliamentary ceremonial.

But a new phenomenon had disrupted this ceremonial and this frame of reference: the party of the "extreme Left," which occupies nearly a third of the benches in the French parliament, is actually no parliamentary party and is not of the Left; it is the representative of a foreign state and a foreign state form. It does not, of course, renounce the psychological advantages traditionally conferred by the label "extreme Left," but on the other hand it does not take the label seriously: "The concepts of Left and Right are outmoded," Thorez declared long ago, revealing a profounder insight than all those Left intellectuals who were attempting to "transcend Thorez on the Left." Soviet Russia is situated not to the Left, but to the East. The working class is not Left, but has needs which can be satisfied, combated, abused, or exploited. The Communist party does not play the "Left"

game, except with marked cards. And this makes the game itself impossible.

Formerly, the continuous leftward movement of the French Republic was like an endless chain, running around a fixed point to which it gave an appearance of movement: new leftists kept entering the government and once in power became transmuted into good conservatives ("... But the finance minister must be conservative," added Léon Say to the revolutionary campaign speech we have quoted above), whereupon a new Left formed an opposition against them, and so on *ad infinitum*. But now the endless chain has struck a snag in the "extreme Left": the Communist party does not "move," it gives birth to no new Left opposition. Meanwhile the governing Left is worn down by power, and the whole system is disorganized. The swarming little movements of the "democratic revolutionary Left" are striving once more to build a Left opposition whose Jacobin ideology is compatible with democratic practice. They refuse to admit that the two were compatible only by way of mystification, and that today, with a Communist mass machine in France and the Red Army on the Elbe, they are not compatible even by way of mystification.

THE only way that still lies open to the democratic Left is to abandon revolutionary mystification. It is a hard way, and the deep-seated French skepticism toward the radical words in which a more than moderate day-to-day policy drapes itself helps but little: it is only the reverse side of a staunch adherence to pure, abstract "principles" which are assiduously safeguarded from practice, since "politics is always a dirty business." A vast display of revolutionary convictions goes hand in hand with an absolute contempt for the practicable, and particularly for what has been actually realized, which measured by

absolute criteria can never, of course, be satisfactory; and this basic attitude is not conducive to the constructive effort without which no democracy is possible. In his excommunication of Rousset, Sartre levels this attack against "our American friends":

"The phenomena of exploitation all over the world represent for them only scattered problems, which can be examined and solved one after another. They no longer have any political idea."

For a political idea which does not solve all the problems at one stroke lies far below the dignity of a Left philosopher. A political idea which is no total vision and is not, either patently or in its tacit consequences, a totalitarian ideology, does not deserve to be called an "idea."

And in this Sartre reflects the traditional mentality of the French Left. Isolated reforms and gradual progress have no charm. This attitude allowed to be created in France a dyed-in-the-wool capitalism of cartels, of prices and profits guaranteed by the state, of reserved markets, of low wages, low production, low consumption, in short, of planned stagnation. This economy of stagnation, which can equally well be regarded as a caricature of socialism as of capitalism, presents no "Left" or "Right" problems: wherever the inertia is overcome, whether by state intervention or private initiative, whether by planned investment or competition, the abolition of protectionism, European economic pacts, technological modernization, or an upward turn of the population curve, a true revolution is under way. This rich country needs little more than a release from the paralysis of anxious egoisms in order to enter upon a new expansion. And it is actually headed in that direction, if only time enough remains. Then perhaps "progressive thinkers" will catch up with progress—but as followers, hardly as leaders.